

Fifteen Jumbo Postcards

Honoring the Musical Achievements of African Americans

Legends of American Music

Volume Two



Count Basie

Born in 1904 as amateur jazz pianist, William "Count" James Basie learned to play the drums and piano. Shuttling under Fred Weller and James F. Johnson during his teens and early twenties in New York, he began his professional career in 1927.

Each year the national spotlight shone on Count Basie and his band from the Savoy Club in Kansas City. John Hammond, a music producer and jazz critic based in New York City, the awards committee and achievement awards followed over the next 20 years as expanded.

By 1940, Count Basie had won the Downbeat Award for Best Big Band.

Count Basie's first recordings were on the Bluebird label. Then he signed with Decca, and later with Columbia.

He sang with Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, and Dinah Washington.

Count Basie died in 1984 at the age of 80. Basie, established his place

in American music history as a legendary big band leader with timeless standards like "April in Paris" and his signature composition "One O'Clock Jump".



Billie Holiday

Billie Holiday was one of 17 children of a black Virginian slave and a white woman. She was born in 1915 and died in 1959.

The future "Lady Day" first heard the music of Louis Armstrong and Bebe Smith on a Victrola in Alice Dean's, the Baltimore "house of ill repute, where she ran errands and scrubbed floors as a young girl". Billie Holiday (borrowing her stage name from the blues singer) was a poverty-stricken child of a neglectful Harlem slum dweller, the daughter of Count Basie and Anne Shan before going solo. Billie Holiday dropped the frightened stage to her first studio session between 1935 and 1936; she recorded over 200 titles, but she never received payment for any of them.

Despite a lack of technical training, Holiday's unique diction, intonational pliancy and scat-chapelle intensity made her the outstanding jazz singer of her day. White middle-class women in her time, because her trademarks.

Her compositions, "Don't Go to Strangers", "Caldonia", "I'm in the Mood for Love", "Strange Fruit", a haunting protest against the racial discrimination she experienced throughout her career.



Louis Armstrong

Raised in poverty in New Orleans, legendary trumpeter Louis Armstrong went on to become one of the universally recognized genius in the jazz genre.

He left school by fifth grade and sang on an amateur basis to help support his family. He was the first person in his neighborhood to own a gun, which he used to shoot birds for fun. He was also the first person in his neighborhood to buy a gun to celebrate New Year's Eve in 1910. At the Colored Wolf's Home, he learned to play the blues, connect with his roots, and read music. Eighteen months later, he moved to Chicago to begin his musical career.

Armstrong learned to play the trumpet when his mentor, Joe "King" Oliver, took interest in him. His trumpet playing and singing became immensely popular when he was offered a position in the New Orleans Rhythm Kings.

During a tour of Europe in 1928, Armstrong's trumpet was stolen. He was forced to improvise his lines. He imitated the sound of the horn so easily that "scat singing" was born. His biggest selling record of all time was "West End Blues", which sold over 1 million copies in 1925.

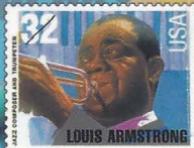
Armstrong appeared in more than 50 motion pictures, numerous television series, and hosted a national radio show. He died in 1971.

Louis Armstrong • Count Basie • Eubie Blake • Nat 'King' Cole

Billie Holiday • James P. Johnson • Clyde McPhatter • Charlie Parker • 'Ma' Rainey

Jimmy Rushing • Clara Ward • Dinah Washington • Howlin' Wolf

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